National sustainabilities

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Abstract

In this paper, we examine the potential for developing a stronger connectionbetween the two significant discourses of sustainable development and nationalism. While there has been limited academic enquiry into the relationships that might exist between these two discourses, we draw on the case study of Wales since 1999 to show how policy-makers are increasingly examining the potential for promoting a more fruitful dialogue between them. We examinehownationalist discourses in Wales have led to the development of a form of sustainable development that is allegedly more attuned to Welsh national values and identities. We also show how sustainable development is being used to imagine new and possibly more inclusive kinds of futures for the Welsh nation. We conclude by reaffirming the fruitful synergies that might exist between sustainable development and nationalism while acknowledging the tensions that arise in seeking to make connections between them.

Keywords: nationalism; sustainable development; Wales

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Introduction

Our aim in this paper is to examine the potential for developing a stronger connection between two of the most prominent political and public discourses in existence today; namely those of sustainable development and nationalism. In general terms, little effort, at least in academic contexts, has been made to examine explicitly and in a sustained manner the connections that might exist between these two sets of discourses. Developing a stronger connection between these two sets of ideas, we contend, is a significant development in both academic and policy contexts and could lead to 1) a more transformative and effective version of sustainable development being adopted in different regions and states; 2) potentially more open and inclusive versions of nationalist discourses being developed.

First, by developing a better understanding of the connections between discourses of nationalism and sustainable development, one might be able to promote more effective and transformative interpretations of sustainable development (Happaerts 2012). Part of the problem with sustainable development to date has been the low levels of adoption of sustainable practices by individuals, groups and organisations. The present human population is currently using the equivalent of one and a half planets to support its activities; high income countries have a ecological footprint five times greater than that of low income countries and 'business as usual' projections estimate that we will need the equivalent of two planets by 2030 to meet our annual demands (WWF 2014). We suggest in this paper that connecting sustainable development discourses to the group senses of identity associated with the nation has the potential to address these issues by a) increasing public *comprehension* of sustainable development, i.e. making sustainable development something that is more meaningful and accessible to particular groups of people b) increasing public *commitment*, in a practical sense, to the principles of sustainable practices, as groups of people are exhorted to make their nations/countries more

sustainable.

Second, coupling discourses of sustainable development to those of nationalism also has the potential to lead to the development of more inclusive and emancipatory versions of national discourses. Much has been made of the exclusionary and 'regressive' nature of national discourses in academic and policy literatures (Ignatieff 1994; Massey 1991). Although there has been some attempt to question the viewpoint that nationalist discourses are necessarily exclusionary in character (e.g. Anderson 1983), in general terms, such a viewpoint prevails within academic, political and popular conceptions of the nation. Although this is in no way straightforward, we contend that the intermeshing of sustainability and nationalist narratives and discourses has the potential to promote a more progressive and less parochial interpretation of nationalism, not least because of sustainable development's emphasis on considering the global and future impacts of place-based practices.

We have adopted a purposefully broad interpretation of nationalist – and indeed, sustainability – discourses in this project. Nationalist discourses refer to the words and practices of a range of different individuals and organisations involved in promoting a 'group-making project' of the nation (Brubaker 2004; Calhoun 1993). Nationalist discourses extend well beyond the policies and practices of nationalist parties. As Billig (1995) has shown, we are all – whether we like it or not – bound up in the discourses of nationalism. Nationalist discourse can be articulated by a suite of different organisations, ranging from political parties of all kinds, governmental organisations of different sorts, as well as NGOs engaged in different aspects of social and environmental activism. Similarly, sustainability discourses are those words and practices promoted by a range of different individuals and organisations, which focus attention on the need to consider the interrelated impacts of current practices on environmental, economic and social futures (cf. WCED 1987: 43).

The article is organised into three main sections. In the next section, we discuss previous work on sustainable development and nationalism, paying particular attention to the contradictory temporal and spatial imaginations contained within it. In the following section, we elaborate on the work that has begun to examine the potential connections between discourses of sustainable development and nationalism. We argue that it has been characterised by a certain myopia because of its tendency to focus on the links between nationalism and sustainable development in 'other' places, most notably postcolonial and postsocialist states. In the final substantive section, we elaborate on a case study, which examines the link between Welsh nationalist discourse and sustainable development in the period after 1999. The discussion shows how nationalist discourses have been used to shape distinctive interpretations of sustainable development that are more attuned to an alleged Welsh national culture, as well as the way in which sustainable development discourses are being used to imagine alternative futures for the Welsh nation. We conclude by reflecting on the broader implications of examining the links between discourses of nationalism and sustainable development or, what we term, national sustainabilities. We argue that this is not merely an academic exercise but also one that has the potential to envigorate the politics of sustainability and nationalism.

Timing and space sustainable development and nationalism

We contend that there has been little systematic and sustained examination, to date, of the potential dialogue that can exist between discourses of sustainable development and nationalism. Key academic texts on nationalism, whether textbooks or research monographs, make little reference to sustainable development. While there is some discussion of the significance of nature and the environment to nationalist discourse, little attention is paid to the concept of sustainable development (e.g. Herb and Kaplan 2008). A similar story can be told in relation to the lack of engagement with nationalism in key texts on sustainable development. One of the most popular textbooks on sustainable development in Geography, for instance, discusses at length the contributions that states

and regions can make to the promotion of sustainable development but is far more silent on the impact that state and regional forms of group identity – such as nationalism – have on sustainable development (Whitehead 2007, though see the very brief discussion on p. 208). Similarly, Lafferty and Eckerberg's (1998) review of the kinds of sustainable development being developed and implemented in various countries illustrates how sustainable development is refracted through different state bureaucracies but does not explore the extent to which these differences may also possibly derive from particular national identities, cultures or values. In short, while space/place and states are seen to matter for sustainable development, the contribution that nationalism may maketo sustainable development remains under-explored.We suggest that part of the reason for the lack of dialogue between these two sets of discourses lies in the fact that they have beenlargely characterised by contradictory forms of temporal and spatial imagination.

The temporal imaginations contained within sustainable development tend to focus on the interrelationship between the present and future generations. The well-rehearsed definition of sustainable development provided by the World Commission and Environment and Development in 1987 (WCED 1987: 43), whereby sustainable development is viewed as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs", illustrates how sustainable development has been used to connect present and future generations, particularly in relation to resource useand to ideas of inter-generational equity. Sustainable development can be viewed as a discourse that is predicated on a care of distant others; in particular those future others who are said to bear the consequences of our unsustainable practices and lifestyles in the present (cf. Massey 2004).Discourses of nationalism largely possess different temporal imaginations. Much of the explicit focusin the academic literature, at least, is on examining national pasts, as well as the way in which thesecan inform national presents (see Kedourie1960; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Smith 1998). There are, admittedly, some exceptions to this general tendency,

including the kinds of temporal imagination that characterise nations that exist, to use Keating's (2001) words, "against the state". Nations that exist in opposition to established states often possess a vision of a national future, based on greater autonomy and self-determination (Keating 1998: 187).

The spatial imaginations that characterise the discourses of sustainable development and nationalism are also, at first glance, contradictory. At heart, sustainability is viewed as a discourse and practice that operates at the scale of local communities and internationally/globally.The significance of the local scale within discourses of sustainable development has been the subject of considerable discussion and critique, with especial attention being directed to the notion of sustainable cities(e.g. While et al 2010), sustainable communities (e.g. Raco 2005) and regions/city-regions more broadly (e.g. Counsell and Haughton 2006; Krueger and Gibbs 2010). Moreover, as While et al (2010: 76-77) maintain, sustainable development does not merely take place over particular local and regional scales. The discourse of sustainable development, rather, is an active agent in a process of so-called 'eco-state restructuring', which helps to reproduce the local/regional scale.And yet, part of the significance of sustainable development is its emphasis on encouraging various actors to think about the global environmental, social and economic challenges facing humanity (e.g. Agyeman et al 2003: 2). The issue of climate change has only added to this global construction of the environmental, social and economic challenges facing humanity (Demeritt 2001) and of the potential role that sustainable development can play in mitigating them.

Significantly, sustainability discourses also make much of the need to connect these different scales – the global and the local – witnessed most clearly in the sustainability exhortation to "think globally and act locally".Sustainable development, in this regard, is viewed as a particularly powerful discourse since it combines an accepted global definition of the term, while at the same time providing a degree of fluidity, which enables more local interpretations of the discourse to emerge in different places

(Whitehead 2007: 187-210). The connections between these global and local visions of sustainable development was made more concrete as a result of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg in 2002, where an emphasis was placed on developing multi-stakeholder partnerships that would cross, and moreover, connect different scales of engagement with sustainable development (Hale and Mauzerall 2004). Similarly, the Rio+20 conference sought to encourage different states to accelerate progress towards the goal of sustainable development but, crucially, in ways that were specific to those states. Geographers and othershave used understandings of the politics of scale and of 'scale jumping' in order to examine more critically how issues relating to sustainable development – and environmental concerns more broadly – can be rescaled in complex ways(e.g. Kythreotis and Jonas 2012).

Nationalist discourses, seemingly, occupy the middle ground between the local and global imaginations espoused within sustainable development discourses. A key aspect of any nation, of course, is said to be its strong association with a particular territory (e.g. Wiebe 2002: 5).Such an emphasis, of course, reinforces the notion that discourses of nationalism are ultimately concerned with one particular kind of spatial imagination; one that is centred on the national territory and the national scale. Admittedly, various authors have attempted to show how discourses of nationalism are predicated on a series of more complex spatial and scalar imaginations – showing how nationalist discourses are connected to global (Nash 2002) and local (Jones and Fowler 2008) imaginations. And yet, at heart, nationalist discourses are predicated on the need to protect and enhance national territories or homelands; some have argued that therein lies a large part of their discursive power (e.g. Paasi 1996).

Although there are exceptions to this tendency, discourses of nationalism and sustainable development have arguablybeen characterised by different spatial and temporal imaginations, ones which appear in tabulated form in Table 1. We suggest that this is part of the reason why there has been little effort, to

date, to examine more fully and more systematically the links that can exist between discourses of nationalism and sustainable development. We begin that process in the following section, where we discuss the limited work that has examined the connections between these two sets of discourses, before moving on to a detailed case study of how these discourses have been connected in Wales since 1999.

Table 1 Timing and spacing sustainable development and nationalist discourses

Integrating sustainable development and nationalist discourses

Some academic work has sought to move beyond considering the impact that place and space has on sustainable development to examine explicitly the connections between nationalism and sustainable development.First, work in political ecology has shown over a number of years how the dominant narratives of donor countries and agencies from the north and west have led to the promotion of hegemonic understandings of nature and sustainable development in *postcolonial states*, which have often marginalised more indigenous understandings of nature-society interactions and the kinds of societal and economic development that are desired (Stott and Sullivan 2000). Indigenous understandings of the environment and sustainable development in postcolonial states are positioned as things that stand largely in opposition to the 'official', 'scientific', and, more problematically, 'rational' understandings of the environment and sustainable development promoted by northern/western or global institutions(de Sartre and Taravella 2009). Such work testifies to a conception that indigenous societies can promote different versions of sustainable development – based on the existence of different values – and that these are sometimes at odds with the 'accepted' versions of sustainable development promoted by western institutions.

At one level, such statements can be said to be rather unremarkable in that they merely provide additional evidence of the fact that sustainable development varies from place to place. We argue,

however, that they also begin to show how group identities within postcolonial contexts can lead to the emergence of different interpretations of sustainable development. This theme has been developed in research by Mawdsley (2006; Williams and Mawdsley 2006) on India. She has examined the growth of the Hindu Right in India since the 1990s and the discursive connections that exist between them and neo-traditionalist environmentalists within the country, particularly in relation to their conservatism, their use of ancient texts as a way of justifying current policies and their romanticised views of India's past. Here, we see an attempt to understand the different vision of environmentalism espoused in India and the way in which that derives froma particular manifestation of Indian political and cultural identity (for Africa, see Black and Watson 2006).Indian interpretations of environmentalism and sustainable development do not derive solely from the existence of particular bureaucratic forms within the Indian state. They are also underpinned by the cultural and religious values that characterise aspects of Indian nationalist discourse.

Second, similar research has emerged on the link between nationalist discourses and attitudes towards the environment and sustainable development in *postsocialist regimes*. In general terms, much research has examined the galvanising role played byenvironmentalism in relation to eastern European nationalist movements (Dawson 1995; Podoba 1998). More specifically, some work has examined howthe socio-cultural contexts – including the nationalist values and discourses – that exist in postsocialist states has been associated with the rise of alternative or different understandings of sustainable development. Oldfield (e.g. 2001; Oldfield and Shaw 2006) argues, for instance, that there is a Russian way of doing sustainable development, which derives, at least partly, from its emphasis on different interpretations of nature-society interactions. Again, Russian socio-cultural values – not just the Russian state – are said to have contributed to the emergence of a distinctive approach to sustainable development. Schwartz (2005: 294),too, has drawn attention to the competing understandings of sustainable development that now exist in Latvia, ones which are predicated on

competing visions of "national geography, identity and developmental destiny". For some, sustainable development allows an imagination of a Latvian nation that is based on the promotion of traditional and parochial farming practices while, for others, sustainable development becomes a means of emphasising a more global vision of the significance of the Latvian nation and its nature. For Schwartz (ibid: 295), therefore,

> as a new post-Communist countryside is being shaped, questions of control over nature and rural land are framed by the interplay between Western paradigms and local contestations of nature and nation.

Debates about the character of Latvian national identity are leading to different intepretations of the kind of sustainable development that should be practiced within the country.

As well as encapsulating the specific characteristics of the Latvian case study that she discusses in her paper, the above quote from Schwartz begins to allude to a set of broader concerns about the research that has been undertaken on the link between nationalist discourse and sustainable development; namely that it can give the impression that the kinds of sustainable development that are developed and implemented in the west are unproblematic since they adhere to accepted western and scientific norms about what sustainable development is actually thought to mean. If there are variations in the kinds of sustainable development practiced in the west, then these are said to derive from local (rather than national) priorities and values – as evidenced in the emphasis on Local Agenda 21 – or from the more bureaucratic variations associated with different state structures. In other words, whereas different forms of sustainable development are countenanced and, indeed, actively encouraged in the west, these are differences that are said to derive from a more neutral language associated with state structures and local accountability, rather than the more loaded language linked to national identities, cultures and values.

We suggest that the attention directed towards examining the connections between nationalism and sustainable development in postcolonial and postsocialistcontexts– and the lack of similar attention directed towards understanding the same connections in western contexts –is anotherinstance of the academic myopia identified long ago by Billig (1995) in his famous book on *Banal Nationalism*. Instead of seeing nationalism as something that exists 'out there' in other places or something that is the characteristic feature of 'extremists', Billig seeks to show that nationalism is something that pertains to 'our' personal and group identities in the 'west'. Billig's impact on the social sciences has been widespread, with the idea of banal nationalism becoming a well-rehearsed, even clichéd, subject of enquiry. But the impact of his ideas on social scientific understandings of discourses of sustainable development has not been examined to the same extent. Does the language used in sustainability discourses reflect thenational culturesor values of western states to the same extent that they reflect the indigenous or national cultures of postcolonial and postsocialist states? Moreover, can a more conscious coupling of these two discourses lead to the emergence of more effective and transformative versions of sustainable development, along with more progressive interpretations of nationalist discourses, cultures and values?

Sustainable development and Welsh nationalism

We focus on two empirical themes in this section that illustrate both the positive potential and problematic tensions that may exist between discourses of nationalism and sustainable development. Our specific focus is on Wales, and this choice requires some justification.Wales is a territory that is located on the western seaboard of the United Kingdom. But it is also more than a territory. It is also described in political and public discourse as a separate nation, albeit one, according to some commentators, that possesses links to British forms of identity (Day 2002; Johnes 2012). While Welsh identity is said to be constituted through a series of broadly cultural factors – witness the existence of a separate language and other traditions and customs – much has also been made of the significance of

Welsh socio-enviromental relations, particularly with respect to their relationship with England and a broader Britain. Debates about the existence of internal forms of colonialism, proposed by Hechter (1975), have been viewed by Welsh nationalists as a conceptual framework for explaining the deleterious socio-environmental effects of being part of the UK (in relation to Welsh water resources, see Whitehead et al 2007: chapter 3; Griffiths 2014).

Partly as a reflection of these kinds of identity issues – but also for more democratic and economic reasons – efforts have been made since the late 1990s to recognize the distinctiveness of Wales in organizational and constitutional senses. An executive devolution of power took place in 1999 through the Government of Wales Act, which created the National Assembly for Wales. Further executive devolution of power occurred through the Government of Wales Act 2006, which gave the Welsh Assembly its own primary legislative powers for the first time. Another, more organizational, reflection of the distinctiveness of Wales arises in the context of the recent re-configuration of the different bodies that engage with resource management in Wales. The Countryside Council for Wales, Forestry Commission Wales and the Welsh branch of the Environment Agency have been amalgamated into one new organisation, named Natural Resources Wales (Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru in Welsh). Formed in 2013, the aim of the organisation is to act as the "principal adviser to the Welsh Government on the environment, enabling the sustainable development of Wales' natural resources for the benefit of people, the economy and wildlife" (http://naturalresourceswales.gov.uk, accessed 19 November 2013).

Another key feature of Wales is that it is a devolved territory that has emphasised – from the very outset – its commitment to the principles of sustainable development. The Government of Wales Act 1998, when it stated that it would seek "to make a scheme setting out how it proposes, in the exercise of its functions, to promote sustainable development", viewedsustainable development as a cross-cutting principle for the National Assembly for Wales (Government of Wales Act 1998: section 121). A

Sustainable Development Unit, based within the Welsh Government, was charged with promoting sustainable development across all governmental activities in Wales. Making such an overarching commitment to sustainable development represented rather a bold move for the Welsh Government and it came about largely as a result of lobbying on the part of a Sustainable Development Charter Group, comprised of Wales-based environmental NGOs, key government agencies and the Environmental Planning Research Unit of Cardiff University(Bishop and Flynn 2005: 96-99). This Group was successful in strengthening the commitment to sustainable development as the Government of Wales Bill passed through the UK Parliament. Moreover, key advocates within the group were keen to see that this overarching commitment to sustainable development was translated into meaningful action. They played an important role in shaping the Welsh Government's first Sustainable Development Scheme, *A Sustainable Wales – Learning to live Differently* (NAfW 2000). At a more micro scale, it has been argued that certain individuals also enabled the goals of sustainable development to be embedded more effectively in the policies and practices of the Welsh Government, most notably Ron Davies MP (Secretary of State for Wales during the passing of the Government of Wales Act) and Sue Essex, who became the National Assembly for Wales' Sustainable Development Champion. It has been suggested that Ms Essex was able to exploit her close links with the Welsh Government's First Minister, Rhodri Morgan, in order to ensure that sustainable development was viewed officially as an 'unique selling point' for Wales (Bishop and Flynn 2005: 99).

The Welsh Government's commitment to sustainable development was re-affirmed in the Government of Wales Act 2006, in which sustainable development was viewed as lying at the heart of the Welsh Assembly Government's work (see Welsh Government 2009: 4). This commitment received a further fillip as a result of the Sustainable Development Bill (introduced as the Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill, 2015). The Consultation paper and explanatory note both claim thatthe passing of this Bill would mean that "sustainable development [would become] the central organising principle of the devolved

public service in Wales"(ibid). This commitment places Wales as one of the few administrations in the world to have such as statutory duty, and also signals its attempt to ensure that all public bodies in Wales adhere to the same ideals. Again, the reasons for this increased commitment to sustainable development in Wales include the advocacy role played by Peter Davies, Wales' Commissioner for Sustainable Futures, and Sustain Wales, an independent body providing support for the Commissioner, advice for all organisations seeking to engage with sustainable development in Wales, as well as regular reports on the performance of the Welsh Government in relation to its sustainability goals (Ross 2010). Key individuals within the Welsh Government have also provided additional impetus in recent years, most notably Jane Davidson, who was Minister the responsibility for the environment and sustainability between 2007 and 2011.

Wales, therefore, is a country, possessing a set of nationalist discourses associated with, but not limited to, the existence of a devolved state. It is also a country that has a prominent set of discourses outlining its commitments to the principles of sustainable development. While these two sets of discourses exist, at least in part, independently from one other, it is noticeable that more is being done to promote the connections between them.We examine these connections in two specific contexts, discussing how: 1) the Welsh nation is seeking to forge its own version of sustainable development, both as a way of making sustainable development more meaningful to the Welsh public and as a way of hopefully promoting a greater engagement with sustainable practices within Wales; 2) sustainable development is being used to create an alternative, progessive (and 'better') Welsh nation. In discussing these issues, we draw on the textual analysis of a range of different documents produced in Wales over the past fifteen or so years: party political manifestos; governmental policy statements and strategies; responses to governmental consultations; laws and regulations; newspaper reports. We have supplemented this textual analysis with fifteen semi-structured interviews conducted over the course of 2013-14 with key stakeholders involved in shaping sustainability and nationalist discourses.

We viewed the interviews as a series oftemporary social relations between us, as interviewers, and the interviewees (as individuals and as key representatives of stakeholder organisations) (Koven 2014). The data produced by the interviews, therefore,werecontext-specific and negotiated articulations of the themes addressed by the project rather than being objective accounts of independently-existing truths. In effect, we viewed the interviews as another set of discourses to be analysed alongside the documentary information, rather than being higher-order or necessarily more insightful versions of the themes being explored. In practical terms, the data collected from the interviews were transcribed and anonymised, and these transcripts, along with the documentary evidence, was coded using a mixture of themes; some emanating from the researchers and others deriving from those that were interviewed.

A Welsh version of sustainable development?

Various authors have contended that the overarching principles of sustainable development have been amended and augmented in various states throughout the world. While much effort has been expended on understanding how these differences derive from the existence of different kinds of state structures and issues relating to local accountability, it is evident that there is something additional emerging in Wales, as sustainable development is being connected to a more loaded language associated with national identities, cultures and values.This does not mean that there exists in Wales a radically different version of sustainable development. Wales operates within numerous political (e.g. UK and Europe), economic (neoliberalism) and scientific contexts, which limits the scope that Wales has to experiment with its understanding of sustainable development. We refer here to differences in emphasis rather than radical dis-junctures in interpretation (Henderson and McEwen 2005).

Generally speaking, the vision of sustainable development that exists in Wales is a broad and all-encompassing one but one in which commitment to the environment is paramount. The Welsh Government emphasised this commitment in the recent White Paper on the Sustainable Development

(latterly Wellbeing of Future Generations) Bill:

> The aim is to ensure that in pursuit of a better long term future, the best possible decisions are made that achieve the maximum possible long term benefits to the economic, social *and* environmental wellbeing of Wales, within environmental limits (Welsh Government 2012a: 1).

While there is a clear indication in this quote of the significance of thinking holistically about sustainable development, there is also a commitment here, at least in the White Paper, to working within "environmental limits", namely that Wales should only make use of a fair share of the earth's resources.This new way of thinking is also spelled out in the Welsh Government's Sustainable Development Scheme. As is rather pithily stated in one section of the document, Wales should strive to become a "One Planet Nation" within the lifetime of a generation (ibid: 11), meaning that Wales, within a generation, should reach a situation in which its "ecological footprint is reduced to the global average availability of resources – 1.88 hectares per person" (Welsh Government 2012b: 8). The broader significance of this kind of statement, of course, is that is helps to re-scale the issue of sustainable development and Wales' commitment to it. The citizens of Wales, here, are being asked to consider their use of resources and their impact on the environment in a global context (Agyeman et al 2003).[i]

The second, perhaps more, distinctive theme in relation to Wales' take on sustainable development arises in the context of its emphasis on social justice. Wales, according to a recent Sustainable Development Report published by the Welsh Government, has "its own account of sustainable development", with an "emphasis on social, economic and environmental wellbeing for people and communities, embodying *our* values of fairness and social justice" (Welsh Government 2012b: 5, emphasis added). Clearly, there is a form of banal nationalism (Billig 1995) taking place in the above statement, with the reference to the existence of a set of values that are allegedly Welsh in character. And yet, this kind of statement does not merely represent political posturing on behalf of the Welsh

Government. All the individuals we interviewed as part of the project were keen to emphasise that what they were doing in Wales was distinctive and, ultimately, connected to the existence of a more socially-inclusive kind of political culture that was associated with the Welsh people. One highly placed individual within Natural Resources Wales, for instance, made the point forcefully in an interview:

> If you look at our aim [Natural Resources Wales], the remit letter we receive from government talks about outcomes and it's true that that relates to more than just the environment. There's far more of an emphasis on reducing poverty etc than you would find with the Environment Agency, with the Countryside Commission in England.

At one level, this different emphasis can be seen as merely another example of the geographical variations that exist in relation to sustainable development. And yet, it is also clear that many perceived that this different emphasis derived from the particularities of a Welsh national culture or set of values (cf. Oldfield 2001; Schwartz 2005). The individual quoted above, for instance, went on to stress that there existed a "deep-rooted" commitment to the notion of society in Wales, one which crossed political divides and one which you "wouldn't see across the boundary" in England. Whether these differences in values between Wales and England actually exist is largely irrelevant. What is important is the attempt to construct an alternative kind of sustainable development in Wales, which is said to derive from a different set of values that are associated with the Welsh nation (Henderson and McEwen 2005). The above interviewee also alludes to an important aspect of nationalist discourse and, indeed, all kinds of identity formation; namely the tendency to differentiate one's nation by contrasting it with another (Conversi 1995; Triandafyllidou 1998). Historically, and even in more contemporary contexts, there has been a tendency for Welsh identity to be defined in opposition to England and Englishness. For this person, the implicit frame of reference for emphasising the distinctiveness of the version of sustainable development promoted by Natural Resources Wales was England.

The commitment to thesocial justice aspects of sustainable development has been further emphasized

in the re-naming of the Sustainable Development Bill as theWellbeing of Future Generations Bill (cf. Ross 2012). As well as drawing attention to the commitment within sustainable development to consider the impact of current practice on future generations, the re-naming of the Bill, according to well-placed individuals, was part of an effort to highlight issues relating to social justice. One notable aspect of this shift in emphasis was the fact that Bill was moved from being the responsibility of the Minister for the Environment to being the responsibility for the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty. For the new Minister, the aim of the Bill was to "future-proof" the communities, which form the "heart of our nation and culture" (Cuthbert 2013, p.1).As one person from Sustain Wales put it: 'the new Minister that came in said 'We want to appeal to Mrs Jones in Treorchy [a former mining town in the South Wales valleys], and that's why we're going to call it the [Wellbeing of] Future Generations Bill''. Here, we witness the efforts being made to make sustainability something that was meaningful and relevant to the Welsh people.

However, attempts to shape a particularly Welsh version of sustainable development – and specifically one that could be connected to imagined Welsh values – extend well beyond the discussion of broad principles. The Sustainable Development Narratives for Wales document was published in November 2013 with a view to exposing the specific language, idioms and imagery that could help to 'sell' sustainable development to a Welsh public (Welsh Government 2013). This guide for policy-makers on how to promote sustainable development in Wales draws on ideas from social marketing (Pykett et al 2014), in which marketing insights from the private sector are used in order to promote public goals. Rather than targeting populations with blanket messages, the art of social marketing 'requires an understanding of specific groups of people – what they value, what they identify with, who they are – and the language that resonates with them' (Sustain Wales 2012: 1).

The significance of the Sustainable Development narrative document is its effort to think of the Welsh nation as a segment of the population that can be targeted with specific kinds of messages concerning sustainable development. On the basis of extensive research using focus groups and a working group on 'Welsh values', it has been argued that the Welsh nation is receptive to a particular language and imagery in relation to sustainable development. For instance, the document describes the 'overarching narrative' that can be used to sell sustainable development to the people of Wales (Welsh Government 2013: 7). It recommends using phrases such as the following:

> In Wales we value the other kinds of wealth that we possess in our relationships with our friends, family and communities. And we have the natural environment of Wales, our landscape, mountains, rivers and seas, which make people passionate about Wales.

The above sentence draws on the two themes identified earlier in relation to the Welsh Government's emphasis on sustainable development, namely the environment and social justice. The document, furthermore, deconstructs the different phrases that resonate with the Welsh public, as well as others that are deemed to be more problematic. Policy makers are encouraged to 'introduce environment after economy and society', presumably since the Welsh population's environmental concerns are less important than their economic and social ones. The Welsh landscape is deemed to be "the key environmental value and is strongly associated with Welsh identity" (ibid). It is lauded as "a source of pride…for both those born in Wales and those who have migrated to Wales", as well as being a source of "calmness, contentment or in Welsh 'bodlon'" (Suatain Wales 2012: 6). Being 'bodlon' is associated with "proximity to the landscape, the re-assurance of the familiar", as well as a "connectedness with the human and natural environment" (ibid: 9). 'Bodlon' is said to resonate strongly with the idea of 'wellbeing', the term, as noted earlier, which has been used more broadly to market sustainable development to the Welsh public.Similarly, the document draws attention to the images that can be used to sell sustainable development to Wales. The document recommends policy-makers, for

instance, to “use pictures that are clearly taken in Wales and contain Welsh identity markers” (Welsh Government 2013: 50).

The document, furthermore, realistically recognises that the Welsh nation is not a uniform segment. In a positive context, the document suggests that specific kinds of messages might be usefully employed in helping sell sustainable development to Welsh speakers (ibid: 22-38). More problematic is the fact that particular kinds of language can appeal to some individuals and groups within Wales, while at the same time disenchanting others. For example, the use of the phrase “we have always survived because we are resilient and stand together” appealed to certain individuals but was off-putting for others, who felt excluded from their community or who felt that people, in general, did not “stand together” (ibid: 43). The images recommended also display a similar tension. For instance, the exhortation to use “images that are clearly taken in Wales”, discussed earlier, is followed by caution that these may be regarded as “stereotyped or old fashioned” (ibid: 50).Finally, the usefulness of the Welsh language as a means of promoting pride in a sustainable Wales is also moot, given its longer-term divisiveness within contructions of Welsh identity (Sustain Wales 2012: 3).

In all this, we witness an instrumental attempt to devise an effective discourse or language that can help to make sustainable development more palatable for members of the Welsh nation. In effect, there is an effort to create a discourse of sustainable development that is rooted in Welsh identity, culture and values. We see, conversely, the perils associated with this process. Nations are never uniform and neither are the nationalist discourses that seek to give meaning to them. Seeking to attach understandings of sustainable development to these discourses, therefore, is never a straightforward process. Some broader concerns can also be noted about this process since it is predicated on a degree of manipulation of audiences as they are cajoled, almost cued in surreptitious ways to tune in to the ideals of sustainable development. In many respects, such concerns echo those that have been

directed towards the increasing use of social marketing and behavior change methods more broadly in public policy (e.g. Pykett et al 2014; Gill and Gill 2012).

We see in this sub-section, therefore, the attempts that have been made to shape a particular version of sustainable development in Wales, one which is based on alleged Welsh values and culture. The importance of doing so is that it can help the Welsh Government and other agencies to make sustainability a concept that is more relevant and meaningful to their target population; in other words, making sustainability more comprehensible to the Welsh nation. It is too early to say, however, whether this tailoring of the sustainability message has led to an increased commitment towards sustainable development among of the Welsh people. At the same time, it is evident that sustainable development has been viewed as a means of creating a new and better kind of Welsh nation and we discuss this theme below.

Sustainable development and the creation of a new Welsh nation

An important aspect of sustainable development, as has already been noted, is its aspiration to create alternative futures. The Welsh evidence demonstrates the fact that the kind of future being imagined is not merely a global, local or state-based one. The evidence clearly shows that an alternative future is being imagined for the Welsh nation and national community (Fowler and Jones 2008). Such sentiments are clearly in evidence in Welsh governmental statements about the significance of sustainable development, as is shown in the following quote taken from the Welsh Government's Sustainable Development Scheme:

> I hope that you will be able to support and join us in this endeavour [the journey to sustainability], so that together we can transform Wales into a sustainable nation (Rhodri Morgan in Welsh Government 2012a: 5).

Some might question the significance of the use of the term 'nation' in the above quote, seeing it rather

as a convenient label to refer to the document's target audience or merely a reflection of a long-standing convention of seeking to embed sustainable development within particular state contexts. But, as Billig (1995) has shown, we need to be wary of apparently innocent uses of terms such as nation, especially when they are accompanied by the use of collective pronouns such as 'you', 'we' and 'us'. There is evidently an attempt being made here to articulate a connection between the desires of the Welsh Government to create a sustainable future for Wales and the contribution that the Welsh people – as a nation – need to make to reachthis goal. It is only by working "together" that this future goal can be achieved. In this respect, the Welsh Government has sought to develop a dialogue with the Welsh public in order to – what we may term – co-produce their vision of a Welsh national future and the role that sustainable development can play in helping to achieve that.

One significant theme that arises in this context is the contention that developing a firm commitment to sustainable development will enable Wales as a nation to raise its profile on an international stage (Bishop and Flynn 2005: 99) or, in other words, to re-scale itself by becoming a global contributor to sustainability debates. The Ministerial Forward to the Welsh Government's most recent Sustainable Development Scheme, for instance, notes clearly the potential role that sustainable development can play in enabling Wales to punch above its weight on a global scale:

> Our Scheme for Sustainable Development gives Wales an opportunity to show leadership and ambition, and to learn from the past. It gives us the opportunity to show how we are playing our full role as a global citizen (Rhodri Morgan in Welsh Government 2012a: 5; see also Brooks 2009: 26).

At one level, this kind of narrative can be seen as being merely an example of nationalist rhetoric, a device used to give the impression that an inconsequential country on the western seaboard of Europe has some sort of presence and meaning on a world stage (Royles 2010). There is, however, some evidence to suggest that Wales' strong commitment to sustainable development is having a positive

impact on its international presence. The Climate Change Commission for Wales, for instance, points to some tangible contributions made by Wales to debates concerning sustainability and climate change; most notably the Wales for Africa programme (a programme, launched in 2006, which seeks to develop closer links between Wales/Welsh workers and Africa, particularly in relation to sustainable development), along with Wales' membership of the Climate Group and the Network of Regional Government for Sustainable Development (CCCW 2013: 27).

More anecdotal evidence supports such statements. In an interview with a well-placed individual from Natural Resources Wales, it was argued that Wales' close connection with sustainable development, along with its sponsorship of an organisation such as Natural Resources Wales, had led to an improvement in its international profile:

> I've become part of European networks now and they know about Wales because of that, because it's part of our legislation, because of us [Natural Resources Wales] as a body too. Only a few countries are in that position, and Wales is recognisable because of that.

The same individual spoke of the pressure that such a reputation could place on Wales and its governance structures. In effect, Wales had 'talked the talk' for quite a while and there was now an expectation that it would deliver on these promises; or, as Happaerts (2012) has put it, to move the debate in Wales from a symbolic politics of sustainable development to a more transformational one. And yet, such a concern does not detract from the broader point, namely that sustainable development had the potential to enable Wales to make its mark on the international stage, thus enhancing its status as a devolved administration.

If sustainable development has allowed Wales to re-scale itself in political terms, then it has also allowed the Welsh nation to be imagined in different temporal contexts.Some of our interviewees

stressed that Wales' commitment to sustainable development derived from the specificities of Welsh history and culture.Wales, it was argued by one respondent from Sustain Wales, had had a history of being wholly unsustainable in terms of its economy and society and that this provided additional impetus for it to become more sustainable now:

> Wales was there at the start of the industrial revolution and the production of coal and then the export right across the world…So it's benefited from it but it's also been, pardon the pun, at the coalface of it. So it's seen its *landscapes absolutely scarred, it's got the communities that are now being hit by inertia* (emphasis added).

Sustainable development has also been used, through the so-called 'national conversation', to imagine alternative, better and sustainable futures for the Welsh nation. As part of the national conversation, which has taken place over the past few years, the people of Wales have been encouraged to determine 'the Wales we want/*y Gymru a garwn*' (Sustain Wales 2015a: 2) or, in other words, the Wales that they would like to see in existence by the year 2050. This is more than a discussion about what a future Welsh devolved state might look like. Some of our interviewees, most notably the following respondent from Sustain Wales, reflected on how this was a discussion about the creation of a new and better Welsh *nation*:

> We're looking to do a national conversation to ask people what kind of a Wales do they want in the future, what should we be aspiring towards so that will hopefully begin to bring out more things about the identity, what kind of a nationhood are we looking for.

What we have witnessed as part of the national conversation is an attempt to envision a different future for the Welsh nation and the role that sustainable development can play in achieving that. Rather than merely being a national community that is imagined in socio-spatial terms (Anderson 1983), what we see in this national conversation is an attempt to develop a Welsh imagined community constituted in

socio-temporal terms, with the current members of the Welsh nation seeking to establish a connection between themselves and the Welsh nation of 2050.

Over 7000 people have contributed to the conversation, along with a range of key organisational stakeholders within Wales, such as the Young Farmers Association. Other contributions have been place-based, thus highlighting how understandings of Welshness – as is the case with other nations – are often viewed through local lenses (Jones and Fowler 2008).The results of the conversation are interesting, drawing as they do on the particular visions of sustainable development that are said to resonate with Welsh values and culture. The so-called 'seven foundations of the well-being of future generations' in Wales are:

> 1. children need to be given the best start in life from very early years;
> 2. future generations need thriving communities built on a strong sense of place;
> 3. living within global environmental limits, managing our resources efficiently and valuing our environment is critical;
> 4. investing in growing our local economy is essential for the well-being of future generations;
> 5. well-being of all depends on reducing inequality and a greater value on diversity;
> 6. greater engagement in the democratic process, a stronger citizen voice and active participation in decision making is fundamental for the well-being of future generations;
> 7. celebrating success, valuing our heritage, culture and language will strengthen our identity for future generations (Sustain Wales 2015a: 5).

Not surprisingly, there is a clear commitment here to themes that are said to be of significance to Welsh interpretations of sustainable development, most notably on social justice and the reduction of inequalities. Equally, there is a distinctive attempt to use sustainable development as a mechanism for protecting and enhancing a key aspect of the Welsh nation, namely its language and culture. But, of course, one could argue that the seven foundations listed above, while well-meaning, constitutea series of vague and ultimately vacuous goals. It would be difficult to find anyone – in Wales or elsewhere – that would disagree with such sentiments. Perhaps as a result of such concerns, there has been an

attempt over the past year to identify a series of more specific and tangible 'national indicators' that will be used to 'measure a nation's progress' towards a better future (Welsh Government 2015: 2).In broad terms, it has been argued that these 'national indicators' of progress should be 'short and manageable' (no more than 40), should apply to the whole of Wales, should mesh together well and should 'resonate with the public' (ibid: 8). The list of indicators is all-encompassing and, some might argue, eclectic in character, focusing on issues such as the birth weight of babies, the qualifications of school leavers, business innovation, safe communities, participation in sport and the quality of soil in Wales (ibid: 10-11). One might question the saliency of these indicators – and, indeed, that is the point of the consultation currently being undertaken – but what is remarkable about this exercise is the way it seeks to isolate, quantify and, through public consultation, ratify those different elements of sustainability that can help to create a 'better' Welsh nation in the future (cf. Bache and Reardon 2013).Sustainability – or the wellbeing of future generations, to give it its Welsh inflection – becomes, therefore, governmentalized or viewed as a discrete and measurable object of governance (Foucault 2001).

At the same time, there is a distinct politics of scale associated with these future visions. The report on the national conversation, for instance, makes much of the need to develop a "common set of values within which we can now develop measurable outcomes to ensure we achieve 'The Wales We Want'" (ibid: 2) and, yet, the report also describes how "local well-being plans" and "Futures Champions" will help to embed the notion of sustainable development in different communities in Wales. The role of Futures Champions is further developed in a statement made by the Commission for Sustainable Futures.Here, it is stated that Futures Champions will be "people who are a key influencer within their organisation or community" and who will act as key nodes within "the Wales we Want network" (Sustain Wales 2015b: 2).While some might bemoan the lack of clarity this situation affords, we argue that it opens the door to a celebration of the plurality of visions that different people and places have of Welsh national futures. It has been argued that nationalist discourses are, in any case, often refracted through

local lenses (Jones and Fowler 2008). It is clear that the kinds of national futures currently being imagined in Wales,and the role that sustainable development might play in creating them, also have the potentialtolead to multiple and locally-based imaginations of what it means to be Welsh, both now and in the future. Here, the national future that is imagined is – in a positive sense – uncertain, as well as being something that is open to negotiation (Augé 2015), not least geographically.

Conclusions

Numerous researchers have examined how sustainable development emerges in different ways in different places but fewer scholars have explored explicitly the connections that can develop between sustainable development and nationalist discourses. Where such research has taken place, it has been limited to postcolonial and postsocialist contexts. More systematic discussions of these connections have, perhaps, been hampered by the different temporal and spatial imaginations associated with the two sets of discourses.Our overarching goal in this paper has been to focus explicitly on the conceptual and empirical connections between discourses of nationalism and sustainable development, drawing on the example of Wales.

The evidence from Wales suggests that some efforts are being made to connect these discourses in political and policy contexts. Attempts have been made to define a Welsh version of sustainable development, one that is based on things that are said to be important Welsh national values. At the same time, the promotion of sustainable development is being viewed as a significant way of re-imagining the qualities of the Welsh nation, witnessed most clearly in relation to the development of new conceptions of a Welsh national future. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that discourses of Welsh nationalism and sustainable development are helping to reinforce (and sometimes contradict) each other in complex and contingent ways. Nor are these kinds of development specific to Wales. The independence referendum in Scotland, for instance, was characterised by debates about Scottish

values, the nature of Scottish society and the use of natural resources in Scotland. In many respects, such themes speak again of a series of interesting connections that are being made – admittedly implicitly in most cases – between discourses of nationalism and sustainable development in Scotland (Ross and Jones, forthcoming).

There is a need for more critical discussions about the productive connections and tensions that can exist between nationalism and sustainable development in policy and popular contexts. There is an argument that connecting sustainable development with nationalist discourses has the potential to lead groups of people to develop a heightened appreciation of the meaning and significance of sustainable development. It is too early to say, however, whether an explicit framing of sustainable development narratives and policies in relation to perceived national values can lead to an increased public engagement with sustainable practices.Furthermore, there is certainly no straightforward connection between understandings of sustainable development and national values or cultures. Using a discourse of nationalism as a way of framing public engagement with sustainable development may well help to alienate some people. Similarly, it is not always easy to define a unified national culture that can act as a vehicle for promoting an increased engagement with sustainability. And yet, public engagement with sustainability has not been as thorough and wide-ranging as it could have been to date. It is surely worth exploring the potential role that can be played by national discourses in helping to increase the extent and quality of that engagement.

At the same time, a more systematic exploration of the connections between discourses of nationalism and sustainable development can lead to a re-examination of popular understandings of nations and the place of individuals and groups within them. The national conversation that has taken place in Wales alludes to an emerging national discourse whose temporal imagination is far more future-orientated than has perhaps been the case. It may lead to a healthy debate about national futures,

especially when they are viewed as being unfixed. Connecting sustainable development and nationalist discourses in this way has the potential to lead tothe space of the nation being viewed as something that is “disrupted, active and generative”, something that is “constantly, as space-time, being made” (Massey 1999: 274).Again, re-focusing on national futures does not necessarily signal a re-configuration of the norms and values that are said to characterise a particular nation. Nor does it necessarily lead to an open debate about the multiple possibilities inherent in national futures. But there is certainly more scope to imagine different and more inclusive versions of the nation, we argue, when one focuses more explicitly on those futures, and especially futures with notions of sustainable development at their core.

While we have focused our attention in this paper on examining the potential connections that can exist between discourses of nationalism and sustainable development, the themes that we have discussed point to a need to examine more systematically the link between public policy and identitymore broadly (e.g. McEwen 2002). To what extent do different kinds of group identity – nationalism but also regional and religious identityto name a few – impact on the kinds of public policy that are developed within particular nations, regions of places? Similarly, how do public policies impact on the national/regional cultures and identities of ordinary people. Developing such connections has the potential, we argue, to enliven public engagement with politics and policies of all kinds. Although there are dangers associated with such a venture – witness the potential for public policy to be informed by xenophobic and regressive senses of identity – making public policies more ‘identity-based’couldbe an effective way,if used carefully and constructively, of countering the growing political apathy that characterises many western democracies. More radically, the incorporation of national/regional cultures – especially those that have a strong tradition of engaging with social justice – into public policy debates could also challenge the current hegemony of globalised neo-liberal policy norms. National identities, calibrated in such ways, could lead to more imaginative and progressive policy solutions than those currently being

propounded, not least in relation to the pressing challenges facing the environment and our use of natural resources.

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